



# Graying of The Raven: Cultural and Sociopolitical Significance of Algerian Folk Poetry

*Aida Bania*

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## **Graying of The Raven: Cultural and Sociopolitical Significance of Algerian Folk Poetry** Aida Bania

From East to West The raven has turned gray O Reader of the unknown Help us in our ordeal! With a fine touch, Aida Bamia has explored the work of Muhammad bin al-Tayyib 'Alili (c.1894 c.1954), a hitherto virtually unknown oral poet of Algeria, bringing to her analysis new understanding of folk poetry as part of a people's collective memory and their resistance to colonization. For 'Alili's audience the despair and suffering faced by poor farmers before independence is embodied by the raven, grown old and gray with ceaseless frustration and humiliation. Because of its oral and all too often ephemeral nature, the work of poets such as 'Alili could escape close scrutiny by French colonial administrators who sought to eradicate nationalistic and ethnic elements. With succinct commentary, Bamia presents an outstanding historical and contextual background for 'Alili's repertoire, while she details the richness and variety of poetic forms that had developed in North Africa. In doing so, she shows an intimate grasp of the poet's repertoire and technique, as well as of the colonial and postcolonial implications of Algerian folklore and poetry. In their citation for the AUC Middle East Studies Award, the judges noted The Graying of the Raven's "insightful perspective on Algerian society and the experience of colonization as perceived by the individual folk poet."

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